

STARK VOTES AGAINST INADEQUATE HEALTH, LABOR AND EDUCATION BILL

Thursday, 23 June 2005

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WASHINGTON

- Today, U.S. Rep. Pete Stark (D-Fremont) voted against the funding bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education for 2006 because it severely underfunds priorities in education, health, worker protections and many other key areas. It passed the House by a vote of 250-151.

The text of Stark's statement follows:

"Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill today. This bill grossly underfunds key domestic priorities in education, health, human services, job training, public broadcasting, and the list goes on and on.

"Appropriations bills typically include at least a slight increase in spending from the following year to make up for inflation, if nothing else. Instead, this bill actually cuts spending below last year's level by \$1.6 billion. The cuts are so plentiful that it is hard to put together a concise statement highlighting my rationale for voting no.

"President Bush and the Republicans in Congress proudly proclaimed their support for improving our nation's education system when they passed the bipartisan No Child Left Behind law. Ever since that time, they've been avoiding putting the dollars behind that commitment. Today's bill is another example of this retreat.

"The bill before us underfunds No Child Left Behind by \$13.2 billion. It also goes on to freeze funding for after-school programs even

though only 38% of eligible programs can obtain funding at these levels. It also shortchanges special education for 6.9 million children by failing to meet our government's commitment to IDEA. Head Start, a program well-documented in its effectiveness, fails to obtain the resources necessary for it to give a step up for millions of eligible children.

"The bill is no better when it comes to important health care priorities. President Bush has gone out of his way to emphasize his commitment to ending AIDS around the globe. But, when it comes time to turn that sound bite into reality, he and his party turn their backs.

This bill eliminates funding to the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS and freezes almost all funds in the Ryan White AIDS programs which provide services to people suffering from HIV and AIDS here at home. At the same time the bill wastes \$115 million on unproven abstinence only education programs.

"This bill eliminates funding for HHS health professions training programs, slashes funding for public health efforts to increase preventive care, eliminates the Healthy Families Communities Access Program aimed at helping local advocates and governments develop solutions to cover the uninsured, and provides the smallest increase in 36 years for the NIH.

"On the human services front, this bill fails to provide needed funds for child care. For the 4th year in a row, it freezes federal funding for the Child Care Block Grant even though millions of low-income families cannot afford adequate, safe child care for their children. It also cuts vital funding for low-income home energy assistance. And, it slashes funding for the Community Services Block Grant which provides funds to local communities to help them provide basic services to low-income families.

"The provision in this bill that has received the most public attention is the provision to gut \$100 million in funding for public education.

I'm pleased that we passed an amendment on the House floor to eliminate that cut. So, we've protected PBS, NPR and other public broadcasting initiatives for now. But, make no mistake about it, the Republicans want to go much further than reducing funding. Much like they're working to privatize Medicare and Social Security, they would happily turn our airwaves — which are public space — over to the private sector as well.

"These are a sampling of the many reasons I oppose the bill before us today. I urge my colleagues to join with me in voting NO on the wrongheaded priorities of the Republican majority. Health, education and human services are core responsibilities of our federal government.

This bill fails on all fronts."